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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DUBAI 006398

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SUBJECT: NGO CLIMATE IN IRAN

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CLASSIFIED BY: Jason L. Davis, Consul General, Dubai, UAE.
REASON: 1.4 (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: In a December 10 meeting in Dubai, Open Society Institute (OSI) representatives described the group's current projects in Iran, where they operate with an annual OFAC license. They also discussed UNDP's work in Iran, and the current NGO climate, including DRL's classified grants to NGOs for Iran projects. End summary

¶2. (C) Open Society Institute (OSI) representatives met with PolEconchief December 10 to discuss their ongoing activities in Iran. In addition to an Amcit director, OSI's Iran-based contractor and a regional official from Jordan were present.

Fighting Drug Addiction

¶3. (C) OSI viewed as an achievement that for the first time, the Government of Iran had approved acceptance of a direct grant from OSI to an Iranian entity, the National Center for Addiction Studies (NCAS), located at Tehran University (Reftel). The grant is used for monitoring incidence of addiction, including the likelihood of different forms of addiction and exposure to harm, such as AIDS. Until now, there has been no documentation of the geographic spread of these problems. OSI also provided a grant via an Asian entity to Persepolis, an NGO drop-in center for addicts.

¶4. (C) To date, OSI has not seen any change from the new administration in GOI policies on fighting drugs and addiction. OSI is considering organizing a tour of high-level Iranian officials to see addiction programs in other countries.

Electronic Information for Libraries (EIFL)

¶5. (C) In September, OSI helped organize a workshop for 74 libraries from around Iran, including the National Library, to work towards a national consortium of libraries. This was a project that had already begun domestically, but now OSI is helping them link up with its international project, EIFL. A national coordinator has been appointed, and they are planning regional workshop.

Women

¶6. (C) OSI gave a grant to Independent Researchers on Women's

Issues, a group that recently put out a report on various women's issues as a follow-up to the Beijing Conference. OSI mentioned Iran has regular exchanges on women's issues with Pakistan, Afghanistan, and other countries.

Other Projects

17. (C) Other projects in Iran include:

- Clinical Legal Education: to encourage law students to do community pro bono work.
- OSI Justice Initiative: to encourage legal reform, particularly related to human rights. OSI reported that the Institute for International Cooperation and Development has expressed interest in the project, perhaps under the UNDP umbrella.
- Penal Reform: OSI has a project proposal with Penal Reform International, which has reportedly been working in Iran many years.
- Cultural: OSI is supporting traveling international art exhibitions and a group in Iran called House of Artists.

UNDP in Iran

18. (C) OSI commented that UNDP has indicated that its past approach to the Iranian government was not the right one, because they let the GOI have too much control over programs and over the writing of the UNDP country report. UNDP was working on framework MOUs with Iran, including on human rights, civil society and NGOs, and decentralization. The human rights' MOU was signed, and the civil society one was close to being signed. The goal is to bring together 15-20 NGOs to agree on broad principles on which to base projects.

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Current NGO Climate

19. (C) OSI said it is harder to work in Iran since Ahmadinejad took office in August. People in the NGO community are scared; there is a cultural tightening, which sounded mostly like self-censorship out of fear of not knowing where the new red lines are. At the same time, however, they noted some NGOs planned to keep working until they hit new red lines. To date, OSI's experience has been that while the new government officials are more ideological, their projects are not, and programs with international components so far have not suffered. OSI also claimed the GOI puts a lot of money into those NGOs that support it, known as GONGOs - Government Organized NGOs.

OFAC License

110. (C) OSI, which operates in Iran on the basis of an annual OFAC license, repeated its longstanding push for a blanket OFAC license for NGOs operating with non-USG funds in Iran. They suggested a set of criteria could be established to guide what kind of Iranian NGOs could be partners, to exclude GONGOs.

Comment

111. (C) OSI is opposed in general to USG funding for NGO activity in Iran, citing worries that foreign contacts will become more dangerous for Iranian NGOs. They also asserted that Iranian activists are wary of being used unwittingly for USG aims. Other than one Iranian NGO worker we heard of who was seeking assistance for a project but expressed fear of being in direct contact with the USG, we have not heard anything else to

substantiate these fears. We will continue to follow closely
GOI treatment of Iranian NGOs and report back anything we hear
from Iranian civil society activists on these issues.

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